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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE SECRETARY

CONFIDENTIAL

November 2, 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNDER SECRETARY

As I mentioned in this morning's staff meeting, I want to call to your attention the pressing necessity for the protection of classified material and the delicate negotiations conducted by the Department of State. Please examine carefully the following chronology of an incident involving an important communication and its premature publication on November 1, and then convey the contents of the substance of this letter to the necessary personnel under your direction.

At 1:35 a.m. Thursday the Diplomatic Telegraph Branch received coded message 1585 from the U.S. Mission at the United Nations in New York. Designated "Confidential, Limit Distribution", the message contained Ambassador Stevenson's summation of the report given to him by Acting Secretary General U Thant of his two days of conversations with Fidel Castro. The message was processed as follows:

2:00 a.m. - Copies by wire to Secretary of Defense McNamara, Mr. John McCone, Secretary of Treasury Dillon, Attorney General Kennedy and Mr. McGeorge Bundy.

3:00 a.m. - Copies to the Secretariat (55) and the Office of Intelligence and Research (6).

6:00 a.m. - Copies to the Bureaus for Inter-American Affairs (7) and European Affairs (12).

6:00 to 8:00 a.m. - Copies to other but not all offices and regional bureaus (a total of 35).

In all, 105 copies were distributed within the Department. From its copies, the Secretariat distributed on the 7th floor and to the Department of Defense (8), the White House (5) and the CIA (3).

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Presumably most of the recipients had need to know the contents of the message, either because of direct involvement in aspects of the Cuban situation or in important matters likely to be affected by Cuban developments.

Within two hours of completed distribution of the message rather precise details of its contents -- even including some of its wording -- were in the hands of a wire service correspondent accredited to the Department of State and by 10:32 a. m. the teletypes of the wire service were carrying to the public around the world these details of a delicate part of a negotiation that affects the basic interests and security of the United States.

Such a prompt and flagrant breach of security is intolerable. It is incompatible not only with the laws and procedures of the government service but with the morality and patriotism required of every government servant. The immediate leakage of delicate information at that time and under the circumstances then prevailing had no relationship to the basic obligation of government to keep the public informed. On the contrary, such disclosure opposed rather than furthered the public interest.

Such premature publication of the details of Ambassador Stevenson's report severely complicated the vital negotiations under way in New York City. The person responsible for this disclosure -- or for like disclosures of classified information above and beyond the reasonable processes of public information -- must bear on his conscience this knowledge: he is guilty of directly jeopardizing the national interest, and the future of all American citizens.

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